



Worker's Health and Safety: A Statistical Program. by Robert Morse Woodbury

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cut to his credit decisions, he may overlook many important factors such as growth and increases in invested capital.

The obvious advantage of eight ratios as compared with the usual one—the current ratio—is that whereas the latter is subject to facile “window-dressing,” it is virtually impossible for a company to dress all eight.

The appendix contains complete applications of the method to a variety of actual statements, with excellent criticisms. The style of the book is lucid and workmanlike, and nowhere have the authors lost sight of the limitations of their system, which is of unquestionable value to any bank credit department.

JOHN G. ROLPH

The Amalgamated Bank of New York

Workers' Health and Safety: A Statistical Program, by Robert Morse Woodbury. New York: The MacMillan Company. 1927. xi, 205 pp.

This book is the first, and we hope not the last, attempt to condense recent discussions of the morbidity and casualty statistics of gainful employment. Dr. Woodbury deals chiefly with the various projects which have been proposed during the past ten or fifteen years for collecting the health and accident statistics of industry. There is no apparent omission of any of the important items in the literature of the subject since 1913. The text has no equal as a catalog of the various uncoordinated attempts to collect statistics in this field of interest.

The book does not, however, meet the expectations or claims set forth in Dr. Moulton's introduction to the volume. The book does not contain, and no book of 200 pages could contain, “an *adequate* appraisal of the existing statistics on workers' health and safety.” It is open to question whether a feasible program of statistics in this particular field could, at the present time, contain two types of recommendations: “first, the abandonment of superfluous compilations and the introduction of such changes in tabulation as can be made without any major reorganization of existing methods and procedure; and, second, recommendations for guiding the further development of statistics to meet present or future requirements.” The existing compilations are not abundant, the methods and facilities vary sharply with the means and personnel available for the work, and the program of “requirements” is far in advance of anything which will be attainable within the life-time of statisticians and economists now living. Whatever deficiencies there are in the methods and substance of industrial health and accident statistics at the present time, may be charged back to the attempt some fifteen years ago to establish an all-too-inclusive wishful, academic program. What was needed then, and what is needed now, is a statement of the most rudimentary statistical program which *can* be funded and administered by industry and by the state labor departments or compensation commissions. This book does not meet that need.

Dr. Woodbury has stated the case of the academic school of industrial accident and health statistics. It is safe to prophesy that little if any progress will be made in the field of industrial accident and health statistics during the next

decade, if the program is not restated by persons in industry and in the state compiling offices, who know what it means to get funds, personnel and consistent performance for an accident reporting plan of even the most elementary character. The experience of the state departments of health, over the past fifty years, in securing reports of the so-called notifiable diseases, and the experience of the state motor vehicle bureaus in securing reports of motor vehicle accidents, strongly suggest the drafting of a program by persons who know what information on industrial health and safety *can* be obtained and tabulated. The public accident statistics program of the National Safety Council passed through the academic stage some six or seven years ago. This program met with no enthusiastic response, at that time, from police and motor vehicle officials. But when the system was revised by persons in direct contact with the patrolman or motor-car operator, and by persons who had to secure funds and personnel for tabulation and publication purposes, the adoption of the National Safety Council plan by states and cities proceeded apace. Today the system covers a population of 27,333,000 in our states and cities.

The Downey program for industrial accident statistics has not failed because of any organic deficiency in the program itself, but primarily because means and facilities have not been, and perhaps never will be, available to meet the full requirements of the plan. It is hoped that current consideration now being given to the system outlined in Bulletin 276 of the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics,¹ will result in the simplest sort of uniform, primary reporting procedure and in a tabulation program meeting only the rockbottom requirements of the case. Contact with personnel, compensation and safety directors in industry, a recital of the budgetary and technical obstacles encountered by state officials, and an inventory of the indispensable elements of an accident reporting system, would show that such a system must be keyed at the level of the paymaster's or time-keeper's clerk who prepares the primary report schedule or at the level of the legislator who appropriates state funds. The tabulation program will have to be simplified to fall well within the financial and technical resources of the average state labor or compensation office.

All that need be said about a system of official vital statistics for the United States was placed on record two hundred years ago by the courts of the Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth Colonies. Yet it was not until 1902 that Congress provided the means for the systematic collection of mortality statistics on a nation-wide basis through a division of the permanent bureau of the Census. We should have no vital statistics today if birth and death registration failed to take into account the exigencies of medical and obstetrical practice and the attitudes of legislatures toward registration and the state bureaus of vital statistics. Even at this late date, it takes the constant vigilance of our federal and state officials to maintain the registration of the elemental facts of birth and death within our states. And this in face of the fact that almost the first thing a state legislature *should* do under a newly-made constitution is to set up machinery

¹ *Standardization of Industrial Accident Statistics*. Reports of the Committee on Statistics and Compensation Insurance Cost of the International Association of Industrial Accident Boards and Commissions. Washington, 1920.

for establishing evidences of right! May we expect, therefore, that any marked progress will be made in a statistical field such as industrial health and safety which has few if any warrants of enforceable law?

Industrial health statistics have also gone through the stage of over-elaboration, over-emphasis and over-expectation. The reports of the Walsh Commission on Industrial Relations, the subsequent publications of the United States Public Health Service, the reports of committees representing the American Public Health Association and other organizations, all contain statements of desirable elements in a program of industrial morbidity statistics. The problem for official statisticians in this field at the present time is to convince managers in industry that they should maintain the simplest records of absenteeism due to sickness and to secure from them either the original records or proper tabular abstracts of the data. The contemporary supply of published material on industrial health exists because official statisticians have been tactful enough to secure the few records available and skillful enough to make the best possible use of the material on hand. There is not any likelihood for securing more or better statistics of health in industry until questions of need, cost and personnel for health-record purposes are settled.

Human nature being what it is, we may not be too sanguine about our capacity to secure data on the score of problems encountered in the prevention of accidents and sickness, in alleviating the consequences of these misfortunes and in distributing money costs through insurance or otherwise. There is always a huge gap between a statement of abstract principles and the expression of those principles in concrete form. This trite observation applies particularly to industrial health and accident statistics.

E. W. KOPF

Metropolitan Life Insurance Company

A Signpost to Social Insurance, by Evelyn Martelli. London: P. S. King and Son. 1927. 87 pp.

Limited to British social insurance this little volume has the merits of stating the fundamental provisions clearly and concisely, and it is up to date. The viewpoint is that of the feminist inquiring how does all this affect "women and their children."

Finding in operation national health insurance; unemployment insurance; non-contributory old age pensions; widows', orphans' and old age contributory pensions; and workmen's compensation, the author inquires for the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship in Great Britain, what is the position of women in this whole scheme.

First of all, "Many of these provisions invite criticism on their own demerits"—the maternity benefits, for example, are still inadequate, while other provisions for sickness and disablement and involuntary unemployment are inconsistent as between men and women. "Differentiation rests on an arbitrary rather than a real distinction," and the remedy for the "high sickness rate of married women